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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show that: (1) language universals have much to offer to students of contrastive linguistics, and (2) in order to make contrastive analysis more meaningful, one ought to go beyond cataloguing mere contrastive structure statements and capture underlying structural tendencies. Some characteristics of word order in Japanese are presented in support of the second position in particular. (Author/TL)

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CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND LANGUAGE TENDENCIES

Joe J. Ree

One fundamental goal of linguistics is to formulate a general linguistic theory that characterizes structural properties or tendencies shared by all languages. Such works as Langacker's Fundamentals of Linguistic Analysis or those contained in Greenberg's Universals of Language[1] make an important contribution to this goal.

Are language universals only for those interested in, or working on, linguistic theory? That is, what can applied linguists or foreign language teachers learn from language universals? I believe a great deal. Let us consider some of the universals of grammar documented by Greenberg (pp. 79-91), which I paraphrase.

Universal 4. With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal S(ubject)-O(bject)-V(erb) order are postpositional (suffixal).

Universal 7. If there is no alternative basic order in a language with dominant SOV order, or only OSV as the alternative, then all adverbial modifiers of the verb precede the verb.

Universal 9. With well more than chance frequency, when interrogative particles or affixes are specified in position by reference to the sentence as a whole, such elements, if initial, are found in prepositional languages, and,

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if final, in postpositional.

Universal 15. In expressions of volition and purpose, subordinate verbal form always follows the main verb as the normal order except in those languages in which the nominal object always precedes the verb. Thus in Japanese, for example, in which the object noun always precedes the verb, the purpose clause also comes before the main verb, as in

J-1 Mary-wa bengoshi-ni naru tameni benkyoo-suru
topic[2] lawyer as become purpose studying do

E-1 Mary studies in order to become a lawyer.

Universal 24. If the relative expression precedes the noun either as the only construction or as an alternate construction, then the language is postpositional. For example, a sentence like "the man (who is) studying English" will take the form of "the English studying man" in Japanese where the modifying (relative) clause precedes the head noun as the only acceptable construction, whereas in a language like Finnish the modifying clause may be placed either before or after the head noun. As expected both Japanese and Finnish are postpositional languages.

There are other interesting characteristics that Greenberg presents, but even these alone seem enough to enable a teacher of English, for example, to have a rather good idea about an SOV or postpositional language. Thus, for example, since Japanese is an SOV language, a teacher of English can correctly assume that speakers of Japanese learning English will find constructions involving relative clauses, questions, verbal phrases, etc. highly unlike

those in Japanese and hence have difficulty. Note that being able to anticipate these structural differences does not require the English teacher to have a knowledge of Japanese in particular. The teacher may just as well be faced with speakers of Turkish, Hindi, Korean. Since all of these languages are postpositional or SOV languages, the English teacher can make the same predictions in regard to them.

In what follows I will compare one feature of Japanese word order with an equivalent feature of English word order and suggest a generalization which may be of importance to researchers in contrastive linguistics as well as to language teachers.

Let us compare E-2 and J-2.

E-2 Helen drank five cups of coffee yesterday.

J-2 Helen-wa kinoo koohii-o go-hai[3] nonda
topic yest. coffee obj. five cup drink-past

In English one has to employ such measure words as cup, glass, sheet, and the like for mass nouns co-occurring with numerals. Thus, as in E-2, one says 'three cups of tea,' or 'two glasses of water.' In Japanese, unlike English, one measure word, or noun classifier as is often called, is obligatory not just for a particular class of nouns but for all nouns that are quantified. That is, in English one can say 'I bought five pencils,' but the Japanese have to say 'I bought pencil-five-cylindrical object,' as shown in J-3.

J-3 watakushi-wa enpitsu-o go-hon katta
me pencil five cyl. buy-past

E-3 I bought five pencils.

Note that in Japanese, noun phrases containing numerals plus measure words,[4] as in J-2 and J-3, all follow the structural pattern noun-postposition-numeral-classifier; that is, coffee-object-five-cup..., Thus, this word order in Japanese is just the reverse of what English favors.

Let us now look at the Japanese sentences which contain no numeral.

J-4 Susie-wa Florida-no Miami-kara kita
of from come-past

E-4 Susie is from Miami, Florida.

J-5 John-wa Indiana Daigaku-no gakusei da
Univ. student is

E-5 John is a student at Indiana University.

J-6 Jane-wa Hawaii Daigaku-de benkyoo-shita
at studying do-past

E-6 Jane studied at the University of Hawaii.

J-7 Taroo-wa America-no Ohio-shuu-no London-de
state in

hatarai-te-iru
work ing is

E-7 Taroo is working in London, Ohio, U.S.A.

Notice that Japanese adverbial phrases in particular consistently favor the construction that places the largest unit, be it geographical or otherwise, first and the smallest one last. Thus in J-7 the pattern is USA-Ohio-London. Consider also the following:

J-8 Paul-wa 1956-nen 3-gatsu 12-nichi-ni umareta
year month day on be born-past

E-8 Paul was born on the 12th of March, 1956.

Once again, Japanese is utterly unlike English in that the year is stated first, and then the month and day.[5]

A number of other similar structural differences can be cited, and, as is often done, contrastive structure statements of one form or another describing each problem may be presented. However, the crucial question that ought to be asked at this point is whether or not the cases discussed thus far are isolated problems. A careful examination reveals that they are far from being unrelated. Is it, then, possible to formulate a simple and maximally general statement that not only includes all the problems presented above but also has a predictive power that will enable learners of Japanese to make the correct assumption about the word order in most if not all similar cases as yet unexposed? It is argued in this paper that the problems discussed as well as others implied can indeed be characterized by such a generalization.

Notice that in all of the Japanese examples shown above, i.e. coffee-five-cup, Florida-Miami, 1956-March-12, ..., the 'class' word precedes the 'member' word. It seems then reasonable to make the following generalization:

> In Japanese when two or more noun phrases having a part (specific)-whole (general) relationship to one another co-occur in a sentence, the noun phrase representing the whole always precedes the noun phrase representing its part.

Given this principle, learners of Japanese will be able to predict correctly the word order in constructions

as yet untried. That is, one can now assume the Japanese equivalent of three persons out of this class or one-fourth, for example, to be this class-of three person and four-one, respectively. And his assumption is certainly correct, as shown in J-9.

J-9 (a) kono kurasu-no san-nin
this class of three person

(b) yon-bun-no ichi
four part of one

Or whether one says 6:50 or 10 minutes to (until) six in English, the Japanese can only say 6-o'clock-50-minute, which is clearly reflected in the above principle.

There is one interesting feature of Japanese syntax that may be pointed out in this connection. In Japanese surface subjects when not topicalized,[6] and hence unmarked by wa, are obligatorily marked by ga, as in J-10, whose difference in meaning does not concern us here.

J-10 (a) Fred-wa Tookyoo-ni iru
in exist-present

'(As for) Fred (he) is in Tokyo'

(b) Fred-ga Tookyoo-ni iru
subject

'It is Fred who is in Tokyo'

What is relevant to this paper is the fact that there are numerous cases in which the wa- and ga-phrases co-occur, as shown in J-11.

J-11 (a) John-wa sakana-ga suki-da
fish pleasing is

'John likes fish'

(b) kono hon-wa e-ga ooi
this book pict. many

'This book has many pictures'

What learners of Japanese have to get used to in constructions such as these is the way in which the two phrases are positioned: in (a) John (presumably capable of having different kinds of mental disposition) is followed by fish (a specific kind of liking) and in (b) the e is preceded by the hon which is the including term. Note that this again is not an isolated problem, and Americans learning Japanese are no longer left helpless. Between the two nominals in each sentence, the including term (general), which typically appears topicalized, precedes the included (specific), for which the postposition is ga.

As one may have become aware, the family name always comes before the given name in Japanese culture. Furthermore, the return address written on a letter from Japan will look utterly unconventional: first appears Japan, next prefecture followed by ward, street, and house number--another nuisance for speakers of English learning Japanese. But, once more, a person studying Japanese does not have to learn the word order involving the address or personal name as a new and unrelated problem; he can simply treat it as another instance of the generalization proposed above. A cultural pattern which is relevant to our discussion is that when you pay for anything, change is returned by counting the bills first then the coins. Now, if the above-

stated generalization can be considered behind the linguistic structure of Japanese, the 'bill-first' pattern seems hardly surprising, whatever implication this may have with regard to the Whorfian hypothesis.[7]

In linguistics one way to evaluate a theory or description is to examine whether or not it captures <u>significant linguistic generalizations</u>.[8] Thus, given two descriptions of English, for example, the one that captures the syntactic properties shared by both non-stative verbs and adjectives (i.e., they are capable of undergoing the same transformations) is more highly valued. The other description that fails to account for this unified syntactic phenomenon is, consequently, said to miss a significant generalization.

Contrastive analysis will become more meaningful (perhaps more useful) if we aim more at discovering interesting structural characteristics from which significant generalizations can be formulated, rather than merely presenting isolated comparative structure statements.

1. Ronald W. Langacker, Fundamentals of Linguistic Analysis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972). Joseph H. Greenberg, "Some Universals of Grammar with Particular Reference to the Order of Meaningful Elements," in Joseph H. Greenberg (editor), Universals of Language (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 73-113.

2. Roughly stated, the topic of a sentence is the central element of a sentence and it ordinarily carries no new information. That is, a topic (often synonymous with a theme) is known both to the speaker and to the hearer, and what constitutes new information is in the predicate. By the term 'topicalized' I mean here a noun (phrase) which is thematized and marked by the particle wa.

3. Although the category number exists in Japanese, it is not productive, particularly when a sentence contains a numeral.

4. Japanese nouns co-occurring with numerals require appropriate measure words, which constitutes a problem in itself for speakers of English learning Japanese. However, I am particularly concerned with, in this paper, characteristics of word order in Japanese.

5. Of course, the day and the month can optionally be permuted in English. However, no such transposition is allowed in Japanese.

6. See n. 3.

7. Also called the linguistic-relativity hypothesis or linguistic Weltanschauung, which asserts that the structure of one's language affects one's thought processes. The most articulate modern spokesman for this theory was the linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf.

8. See Langacker (Chapter 1) for a detailed discussion of this.